

**SENATOR TOM UDALL PREPARED REMARKS  
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Thank you, Aaron for the kind introduction.

Serving as Vice Chair of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee has been one of the greatest honors in my three decades of public service.

With this role has come tremendous responsibility.

Since taking it on in 2017, I've worked hard to maintain bipartisanship on the committee. I'd like to thank Chairman Hoeven for doing the same. Native American issues are not red or blue. We must work across the aisle to get things done for Indian Country.

NCAI is the oldest, largest – and one of the most effective -- American Indian and Alaska Native organizations in the country. Thank you, Aaron, President Sharp, the board, CEO Allis, and NCAI staff for your leadership and hard work.

I'm grateful to all of you here and the many Tribal leaders, community activists, and experts across the nation who I've worked with – and learned from – to advance Tribal priorities.

In any legislation or work with Tribes I undertake – I'm guided by three core principles: respecting Tribal sovereignty, promoting Tribal self-determination, and ensuring meaningful government-to-government consultation takes place.

During the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress and the first session of the 116<sup>th</sup>, I sought to embed these principles in my work and, together with your help, we made progress.

I'll highlight a few examples and talk some about our work ahead.

First – an issue that is important to everyone here: budgetary certainty. Shutdowns, sequestration, and continuing resolutions hurt your communities especially hard. And they represent a failure to uphold our federal trust and treaty responsibility.

That's why I've introduced legislation to move essential Indian programs to an advance appropriations cycle. But, I need your help to educate Congress about how important this is. So, if you have meetings on the Hill or with the Administration this week, I urge you to discuss this problem and the need to take action.

Supporting Native cultures and protecting cultural resources is of course a top priority as well.

To a great extent, today's federal Indian policy aims to reverse the disastrous policies of the past – where destruction of Native homelands and assimilation was the norm.

That's why I'm fighting to enact laws and bolster federal programs that advance cultural sovereignty.

In December, my bill to reauthorize the Esther Martinez Native Languages Programs was signed into law. This program helps keep Native languages alive by providing Native communities with flexible resources to develop language tools or start immersion schools. Maintaining the vitality of Native languages is paramount.

We must also work to preserve sacred sites and cultural landscapes – which are irreplaceable – from destruction and desecration.

Unfortunately, this is ground zero for many of today's public lands fights.

We've made some progress protecting places like the greater Chaco Canyon landscape. Last year, I worked with New Mexico's Tribal leaders to include Interior appropriations language that protects a buffer zone around the historical park, which many Tribal nations consider their ancestral homeland.

But we must continue to restore places like Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. I'm in court and in Congress fighting to restore the monuments decimated by this administration.

Another priority area is reducing and protecting against climate change and species destruction on Native communities.

We're facing a nature crisis here and around the world. And Indian Country is no exception. We're losing animal and plant species and habitat at unprecedented rates. Protecting biodiversity is about protecting the environment, us as humans, and your culture and way of life for future generations.

Last year, I introduced the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act.

Wildlife corridors restore species connectivity, facilitate migration, and safeguard species against the devastating impacts of climate change and habitat loss. I'm thankful for the support my bill has received from Indian Country. And, I'm pleased to report the House recently passed the bill out of committee, and I'm looking forward to considering it in the Senate Indian Affairs Committee soon.

I firmly believe in the power of Tribal self-determination: decisions made for Indians by Indians produce the best outcomes for the unique needs of their communities. And we have had success strengthening Tribal self-determination in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, we made history expanding self-determination to USDA. We authorized a USDA Tribal self-determination demonstration project for forestry and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

To address self-determination more comprehensively, we're pushing the PROGRESS for Indian Tribes Act. This bill will streamline the Interior Department's self-governance process and give Tribes more flexibility to tailor and manage federal programs to fit the needs of their communities. This bill passed the Senate last June. And, now, I'm working with leadership in the House to get it over the finish line.

I've also heard loud and clear – public safety issues loom large for Native communities. In recent years we've seen increases in funding for Tribal law enforcement and set-asides for Tribal initiatives – to make sure Tribes get their fair share of federal dollars.

But, we have unfinished business if we hope to tackle the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women crisis head-on and closing the jurisdictional loopholes in the Violence Against Women Act so that Tribes have the tools they need to protect their communities. Those critical issues are top of my agenda for this year.

Continued economic development is a top priority for Native communities. And it's another area where I've worked closely with Tribes.

My bill, the Native American Business Incubators Program Act, will create a competitive grant program in DOI's Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development to establish business incubators. These incubators will help Native-owned small businesses navigate challenges unique to them. That bill passed the Senate. And I'm working to get it passed in the House and signed into law.

Another key to economic development is making sure Tribes are not left behind in the digital age. Right now, more than 35 percent of persons on Tribal lands lack broadband, compared to 8 percent of the rest of the nation. This week I'm introducing a telecommunications bill that will make significant gains toward bridging the Tribal digital divide.

In closing – please know I am committed to working with NCAI and Native communities everywhere for many years to come -- to address your priorities, to strengthen Tribal sovereignty, to promote self-determination, and to foster improved government-to-government consultation.